THE INFERNAL TRAP

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A Short Story of Arsene Lupin from the collection:
1912

THE CONFESSIONS
OF ARSÈNE LUPIN
By
MAURICE LeBLANC

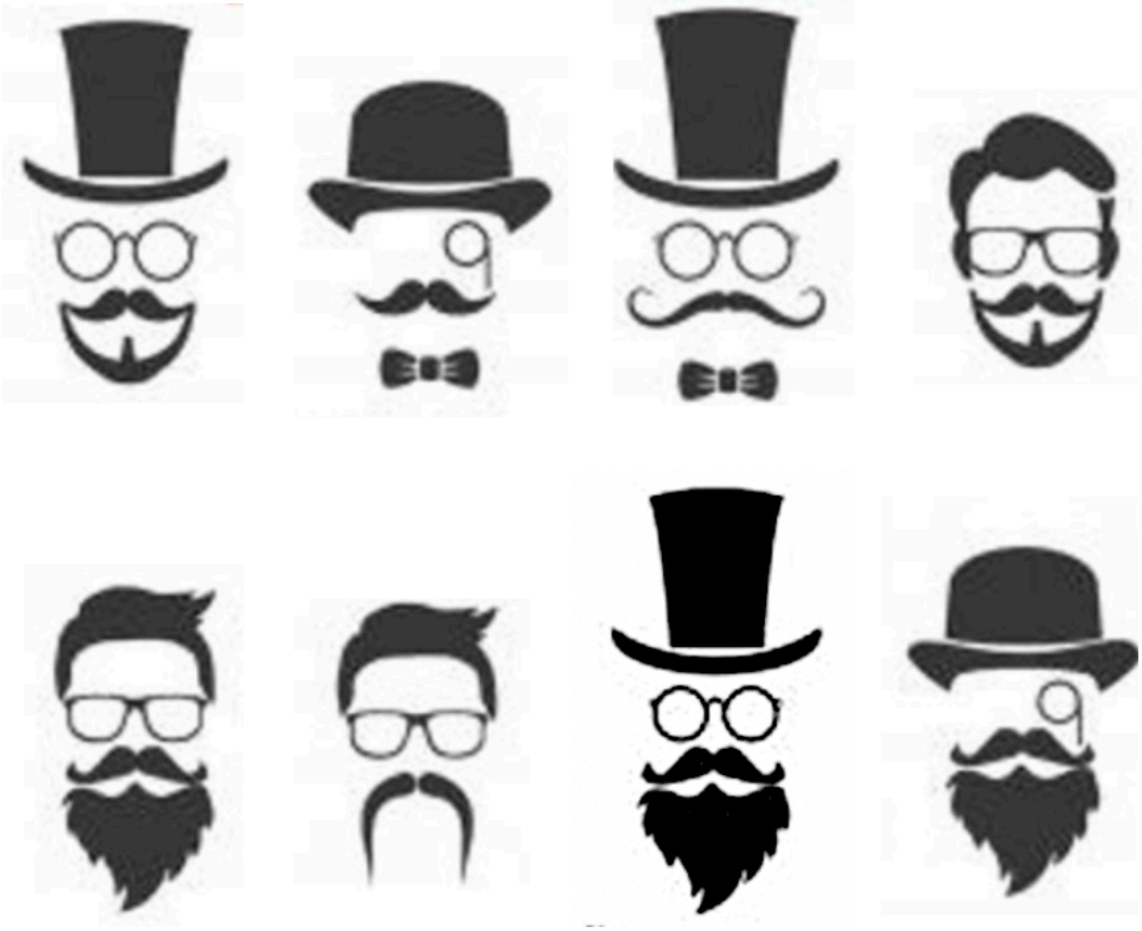
THE MANY DISGUISES
OF

Arsène Lupin

The Gentleman Burglar

THE INFERNAL TRAP

The Confessions of Arsène Lupin



BOOK SERIES No. IV

THE INFERNAL TRAP

When the race was over, a crowd of people, streaming toward the exit from the grand stand, pushed against Nicolas Dugrival. He brought his hand smartly to the inside pocket of his jacket.

"What's the matter?" asked his wife.

"I still feel nervous ... with that money on me! I'm afraid of some nasty accident."

She muttered:

"And I can't understand you. How can you think of carrying such a sum about with you? Every farthing we possess! Lord knows, it cost us trouble enough to earn!"

"Pooh!" he said. "No one would guess that it is here, in my pocket-book."

"Yes, yes," she grumbled. "That young man-servant whom we discharged last week knew all about it, didn't he, Gabriel?"

"Yes, aunt," said a youth standing beside her.

Nicolas Dugrival, his wife and his nephew Gabriel were well-known figures at the race-meetings, where the regular frequenters saw them almost every day: Dugrival, a big, fat, red-faced man, who looked as if he knew how to enjoy life; his wife, also built on heavy lines, with a coarse, vulgar face, and always dressed in a plum-coloured silk much the worse for wear; the nephew, quite young, slender, with pale features, dark eyes and fair and rather curly hair.

As a rule, the couple remained seated throughout the afternoon. It was Gabriel who betted for his uncle, watching the horses in the paddock, picking up tips to right and left among the jockeys and stable-lads, running backward and forward between the stands and the *pari-mutuel*.

Luck had favoured them that day, for, three times, Dugrival's neighbours saw the young man come back and hand him money.

The fifth race was just finishing. Dugrival lit a cigar. At that moment, a gentleman in a tight-fitting brown suit, with a face ending in a peaked grey beard, came up to him and asked, in a confidential whisper:

"Does this happen to belong to you, sir?"

And he displayed a gold watch and chain.

Dugrival gave a start:

"Why, yes ... it's mine.... Look, here are my initials, N. G.: Nicolas Dugrival!"

And he at once, with a movement of terror, clapped his hand to his jacket-pocket. The note-case was still there.

"Ah," he said, greatly relieved, "that's a piece of luck!... But, all the same, how on earth was it done?... Do you know the scoundrel?"

"Yes, we've got him locked up. Pray come with me and we'll soon look into the matter."

"Whom have I the honour ...?"

"M. Delangle, detective-inspector. I have sent to let M. Marquenne, the magistrate, know."

Nicolas Dugrival went out with the inspector; and the two of them started for the commissary's office, some distance behind the grand stand. They were within fifty yards of it, when the inspector was accosted by a man who said to him, hurriedly:

"The fellow with the watch has blabbed; we are on the tracks of a whole gang. M. Marquenne wants you to wait for him at the *pari-mutuel* and to keep a look-out near the fourth booth."

There was a crowd outside the betting-booths and Inspector Delangle muttered:

"It's an absurd arrangement.... Whom am I to look out for?... That's just like M. Marquenne!..."

He pushed aside a group of people who were crowding too close upon him:

"By Jove, one has to use one's elbows here and keep a tight hold on one's purse. That's the way you got your watch pinched, M. Dugrival!"

"I can't understand...."

"Oh, if you knew how those gentry go to work! One never guesses what they're up to next. One of them treads on your foot, another gives you a poke in the eye with his stick and the third picks your pocket before you

know where you are.... I've been had that way myself." He stopped and then continued, angrily. "But, bother it, what's the use of hanging about here! What a mob! It's unbearable!... Ah, there's M. Marquenne making signs to us!... One moment, please ... and be sure and wait for me here."

He shouldered his way through the crowd. Nicolas Dugrival followed him for a moment with his eyes. Once the inspector was out of sight, he stood a little to one side, to avoid being hustled.

A few minutes passed. The sixth race was about to start, when Dugrival saw his wife and nephew looking for him. He explained to them that Inspector Delangle was arranging matters with the magistrate.

"Have you your money still?" asked his wife.

"Why, of course I have!" he replied. "The inspector and I took good care, I assure you, not to let the crowd jostle us."

He felt his jacket, gave a stifled cry, thrust his hand into his pocket and began to stammer inarticulate syllables, while Mme. Dugrival gasped, in dismay:

"What is it? What's the matter?"

"Stolen!" he moaned. "The pocket-book ... the fifty notes!..."

"It's not true!" she screamed. "It's not true!"

"Yes, the inspector ... a common sharper ... he's the man...."

She uttered absolute yells:

"Thief! Thief! Stop thief!... My husband's been robbed!... Fifty thousand francs!... We are ruined!... Thief! Thief ..."

In a moment they were surrounded by policemen and taken to the commissary's office. Dugrival went like a lamb, absolutely bewildered.

His wife continued to shriek at the top of her voice, piling up explanations, railing against the inspector:

"Have him looked for!... Have him found!... A brown suit.... A pointed beard.... Oh, the villain, to think what he's robbed us of!... Fifty thousand francs!... Why ... why, Dugrival, what are you doing?"

With one bound, she flung herself upon her husband. Too late! He had pressed the barrel of a revolver against his temple. A shot rang out. Dugrival fell. He was dead.

The reader cannot have forgotten the commotion made by the newspapers in connection with this case, nor how they jumped at the opportunity once more to accuse the police of carelessness and blundering. Was it conceivable that a pick-pocket could play the part of an inspector like that, in broad daylight and in a public place, and rob a respectable man with impunity?

Nicolas Dugrival's widow kept the controversy alive, thanks to her jeremiads and to the interviews which she granted on every hand. A reporter had secured a snapshot of her in front of her husband's body, holding up her hand and swearing to revenge his death. Her nephew Gabriel was standing beside her, with hatred pictured in his face. He, too, it appeared, in a few words uttered in a whisper, but in a tone of fierce determination, had taken an oath to pursue and catch the murderer.

The accounts described the humble apartment which they occupied at the Batignolles; and, as they had been robbed of all their means, a sporting-paper opened a subscription on their behalf.

As for the mysterious Delangle, he remained undiscovered. Two men were arrested, but had to be released forthwith. The police took up a number of clues, which were at once abandoned; more than one name was mentioned; and, lastly, they accused Arsène Lupin, an action which

provoked the famous burglar's celebrated cable, dispatched from New York six days after the incident:

"Protest indignantly against calumny invented by baffled police. Send my condolences to unhappy victims. Instructing my bankers to remit them fifty thousand francs.

"Lupin."

True enough, on the day after the publication of the cable, a stranger rang at Mme. Dugrival's door and handed her an envelope. The envelope contained fifty thousand-franc notes.

This theatrical stroke was not at all calculated to allay the universal comment. But an event soon occurred which provided any amount of additional excitement. Two days later, the people living in the same house as Mme. Dugrival and her nephew were awakened, at four o'clock in the morning, by horrible cries and shrill calls for help. They rushed to the flat. The porter succeeded in opening the door. By the light of a lantern carried by one of the neighbours, he found Gabriel stretched at full-length in his bedroom, with his wrists and ankles bound and a gag forced into his mouth, while, in the next room, Mme. Dugrival lay with her life's blood ebbing away through a great gash in her breast.

She whispered:

"The money.... I've been robbed.... All the notes gone...."

And she fainted away.

What had happened? Gabriel said—and, as soon as she was able to speak, Mme. Dugrival completed her nephew's story—that he was startled from his sleep by finding himself attacked by two men, one of whom gagged him, while the other fastened him down. He was unable to see the men in the dark, but he heard the noise of the struggle between them and his aunt. It was a terrible struggle, Mme. Dugrival declared.

The ruffians, who obviously knew their way about, guided by some intuition, made straight for the little cupboard containing the money and, in spite of her resistance and outcries, laid hands upon the bundle of bank-notes. As they left, one of them, whom she had bitten in the arm, stabbed her with a knife, whereupon the men had both fled.

"Which way?" she was asked.

"Through the door of my bedroom and afterward, I suppose, through the hall-door."

"Impossible! The porter would have noticed them."

For the whole mystery lay in this: how had the ruffians entered the house and how did they manage to leave it? There was no outlet open to them. Was it one of the tenants? A careful inquiry proved the absurdity of such a supposition.

What then?

Chief-inspector Ganimard, who was placed in special charge of the case, confessed that he had never known anything more bewildering:

"It's very like Lupin," he said, "and yet it's not Lupin.... No, there's more in it than meets the eye, something very doubtful and suspicious.... Besides, if it were Lupin, why should he take back the fifty thousand francs which he sent? There's another question that puzzles me: what is the connection between the second robbery and the first, the one on the race-course? The whole thing is incomprehensible and I have a sort of feeling—which is very rare with me—that it is no use hunting. For my part, I give it up."

The examining-magistrate threw himself into the case with heart and soul. The reporters united their efforts with those of the police. A famous English sleuth-hound crossed the Channel. A wealthy American, whose head had been turned by detective-stories, offered a big reward to

whosoever should supply the first information leading to the discovery of the truth. Six weeks later, no one was any the wiser. The public adopted Ganimard's view; and the examining-magistrate himself grew tired of struggling in a darkness which only became denser as time went on.

And life continued as usual with Dugrival's widow. Nursed by her nephew, she soon recovered from her wound. In the mornings, Gabriel settled her in an easy-chair at the dining-room window, did the rooms and then went out marketing. He cooked their lunch without even accepting the proffered assistance of the porter's wife.

Worried by the police investigations and especially by the requests for interviews, the aunt and nephew refused to see anybody. Not even the portress, whose chatter disturbed and wearied Mme. Dugrival, was admitted. She fell back upon Gabriel, whom she accosted each time that he passed her room:

"Take care, M. Gabriel, you're both of you being spied upon. There are men watching you. Why, only last night, my husband caught a fellow staring up at your windows."

"Nonsense!" said Gabriel. "It's all right. That's the police, protecting us."

One afternoon, at about four o'clock, there was a violent altercation between two costermongers at the bottom of the street. The porter's wife at once left her room to listen to the invectives which the adversaries were hurling at each other's heads.

Her back was no sooner turned than a man, young, of medium height and dressed in a grey suit of irreproachable cut, slipped into the house and ran up the staircase.

When he came to the third floor, he rang the bell. Receiving no answer, he rang again. At the third summons, the door opened.

"Mme. Dugrival?" he asked, taking off his hat.

"Mme. Dugrival is still an invalid and unable to see any one," said Gabriel, who stood in the hall.

"It's most important that I should speak to her."

"I am her nephew and perhaps I could take her a message...."

"Very well," said the man. "Please tell Mme. Dugrival that an accident has supplied me with valuable information concerning the robbery from which she has suffered and that I should like to go over the flat and ascertain certain particulars for myself. I am accustomed to this sort of inquiry; and my call is sure to be of use to her."

Gabriel examined the visitor for a moment, reflected and said:

"In that case, I suppose my aunt will consent ... Pray come in."

He opened the door of the dining-room and stepped back to allow the other to pass. The stranger walked to the threshold, but, at the moment when he was crossing it, Gabriel raised his arm and, with a swift movement, struck him with a dagger over the right shoulder.

A burst of laughter rang through the room:

"Got him!" cried Mme. Dugrival, darting up from her chair. "Well done, Gabriel! But, I say, you haven't killed the scoundrel, have you?"

"I don't think so, aunt. It's a small blade and I didn't strike him too hard."

The man was staggering, with his hands stretched in front of him and his face deathly pale.

"You fool!" sneered the widow. "So you've fallen into the trap ... and a good job too! We've been looking out for you a long time. Come, my fine fellow, down with you! You don't care about it, do you? But you

can't help yourself, you see. That's right: one knee on the ground, before the missus ... now the other knee.... How well we've been brought up!... Crash, there we go on the floor! Lord, if my poor Dugrival could only see him like that!... And now, Gabriel, to work!"

She went to her bedroom and opened one of the doors of a hanging wardrobe filled with dresses. Pulling these aside, she pushed open another door which formed the back of the wardrobe and led to a room in the next house:

"Help me carry him, Gabriel. And you'll nurse him as well as you can, won't you? For the present, he's worth his weight in gold to us, the artist!..."

The hours succeeded one another. Days passed.

One morning, the wounded man regained a moment's consciousness. He raised his eyelids and looked around him.

He was lying in a room larger than that in which he had been stabbed, a room sparsely furnished, with thick curtains hanging before the windows from top to bottom. There was light enough, however, to enable him to see young Gabriel Dugrival seated on a chair beside him and watching him.

"Ah, it's you, youngster!" he murmured. "I congratulate you, my lad. You have a sure and pretty touch with the dagger."

And he fell asleep again.

That day and the following days, he woke up several times and, each time, he saw the stripling's pale face, his thin lips and his dark eyes, with the hard look in them:

"You frighten me," he said. "If you have sworn to do for me, don't stand on ceremony. But cheer up, for goodness' sake. The thought of death has always struck me as the most humorous thing in the world. Whereas, with you, old chap, it simply becomes lugubrious. I prefer to go to sleep. Good-night!"

Still, Gabriel, in obedience to Mme. Dugrival's orders, continued to nurse him with the utmost care and attention. The patient was almost free from fever and was beginning to take beef-tea and milk. He gained a little strength and jested:

"When will the convalescent be allowed his first drive? Is the bath-chair there? Why, cheer up, stupid! You look like a weeping-willow contemplating a crime. Come, just one little smile for daddy!"

One day, on waking, he had a very unpleasant feeling of constraint. After a few efforts, he perceived that, during his sleep, his legs, chest and arms had been fastened to the bedstead with thin wire strands that cut into his flesh at the least movements.

"Ah," he said to his keeper, "this time it's the great performance! The chicken's going to be bled. Are you operating, Angel Gabriel? If so, see that your razor's nice and clean, old chap! The antiseptic treatment, *if* you please!"

But he was interrupted by the sound of a key grating in the lock. The door opposite opened and Mme. Dugrival appeared.

She approached slowly, took a chair and, producing a revolver from her pocket, cocked it and laid it on the table by the bedside.

"Brrrrr!" said the prisoner. "We might be at the Ambigu!... Fourth act: the Traitor's Doom. And the fair sex to do the deed.... The hand of the Graces.... What an honour!... Mme. Dugrival, I rely on you not to disfigure me."

"Hold your tongue, Lupin."

"Ah, so you know?... By Jove, how clever we are!"

"Hold your tongue, Lupin."

There was a solemn note in her voice that impressed the captive and compelled him to silence. He watched his two gaolers in turns. The bloated features and red complexion of Mme. Dugrival formed a striking contrast with her nephew's refined face; but they both wore the same air of implacable resolve.

The widow leant forward and said:

"Are you prepared to answer my questions?"

"Why not?"

"Then listen to me. How did you know that Dugrival carried all his money in his pocket?"

"Servants' gossip...."

"A young man-servant whom we had in our employ: was that it?"

"Yes."

"And did you steal Dugrival's watch in order to give it back to him and inspire him with confidence?"

"Yes."

She suppressed a movement of fury:

"You fool! You fool!... What! You rob my man, you drive him to kill himself and, instead of making tracks to the uttermost ends of the earth and hiding yourself, you go on playing Lupin in the heart of Paris!... Did

you forget that I swore, on my dead husband's head, to find his murderer?"

"That's what staggers me," said Lupin. "How did you come to suspect me?"

"How? Why, you gave yourself away!"

"I did?..."

"Of course.... The fifty thousand francs...."

"Well, what about it? A present...."

"Yes, a present which you gave cabled instructions to have sent to me, so as to make believe that you were in America on the day of the races. A present, indeed! What humbug! The fact is, you didn't like to think of the poor fellow whom you had murdered. So you restored the money to the widow, publicly, of course, because you love playing to the gallery and ranting and posing, like the mountebank that you are. That was all very nicely thought out. Only, my fine fellow, you ought not to have sent me the selfsame notes that were stolen from Dugrival! Yes, you silly fool, the selfsame notes and no others! We knew the numbers, Dugrival and I did. And you were stupid enough to send the bundle to me. Now do you understand your folly?"

Lupin began to laugh:

"It was a pretty blunder, I confess. I'm not responsible; I gave different orders. But, all the same I can't blame any one except myself."

"Ah, so you admit it! You signed your theft and you signed your ruin at the same time. There was nothing left to be done but to find you. Find you? No, better than that. Sensible people don't find Lupin: they make him come to them! That was a masterly notion. It belongs to my young nephew, who loathes you as much as I do, if possible, and who knows

you thoroughly, through reading all the books that have been written about you. He knows your prying nature, your need to be always plotting, your mania for hunting in the dark and unravelling what others have failed to unravel. He also knows that sort of sham kindness of yours, the drivelling sentimentality that makes you shed crocodile tears over the people you victimize; And he planned the whole farce! He invented the story of the two burglars, the second theft of fifty thousand francs! Oh, I swear to you, before Heaven, that the stab which I gave myself with my own hands never hurt me! And I swear to you, before Heaven, that we spent a glorious time waiting for you, the boy and I, peeping out at your confederates who prowled under our windows, taking their bearings! And there was no mistake about it: you were bound to come! Seeing that you had restored the Widow Dugrival's fifty thousand francs, it was out of the question that you should allow the Widow Dugrival to be robbed of her fifty thousand francs! You were bound to come, attracted by the scent of the mystery. You were bound to come, for swagger, out of vanity! And you come!"

The widow gave a strident laugh:

"Well played, wasn't it? The Lupin of Lupins, the master of masters, inaccessible and invisible, caught in a trap by a woman and a boy!... Here he is in flesh and bone ... here he is with hands and feet tied, no more dangerous than a sparrow ... here is he ... here he is!..."

She shook with joy and began to pace the room, throwing sidelong glances at the bed, like a wild beast that does not for a moment take its eyes from its victim. And never had Lupin beheld greater hatred and savagery in any human being.

"Enough of this prattle," she said.

Suddenly restraining herself, she stalked back to him and, in a quite different tone, in a hollow voice, laying stress on every syllable:

"Thanks to the papers in your pocket, Lupin, I have made good use of the last twelve days. I know all your affairs, all your schemes, all your assumed names, all the organization of your band, all the lodgings which you possess in Paris and elsewhere. I have even visited one of them, the most secret, the one where you hide your papers, your ledgers and the whole story of your financial operations. The result of my investigations is very satisfactory. Here are four cheques, taken from four cheque-books and corresponding with four accounts which you keep at four different banks under four different names. I have filled in each of them for ten thousand francs. A larger figure would have been too risky. And, now, sign."

"By Jove!" said Lupin, sarcastically. "This is blackmail, my worthy Mme. Dugrival."

"That takes your breath away, what?"

"It takes my breath away, as you say."

"And you find an adversary who is a match for you?"

"The adversary is far beyond me. So the trap—let us call it infernal—the infernal trap into which I have fallen was laid not merely by a widow thirsting for revenge, but also by a first-rate business woman anxious to increase her capital?"

"Just so."

"My congratulations. And, while I think of it, used M. Dugrival perhaps to ...?"

"You have hit it, Lupin. After all, why conceal the fact? It will relieve your conscience. Yes, Lupin, Dugrival used to work on the same lines as yourself. Oh, not on the same scale!... We were modest people: a louis here, a louis there ... a purse or two which we trained Gabriel to pick up

at the races.... And, in this way, we had made our little pile ... just enough to buy a small place in the country."

"I prefer it that way," said Lupin.

"That's all right! I'm only telling you, so that you may know that I am not a beginner and that you have nothing to hope for. A rescue? No. The room in which we now are communicates with my bedroom. It has a private outlet of which nobody knows. It was Dugrival's special apartment. He used to see his friends here. He kept his implements and tools here, his disguises ... his telephone even, as you perceive. So there's no hope, you see. Your accomplices have given up looking for you here. I have sent them off on another track. Your goose is cooked. Do you begin to realize the position?"

"Yes."

"Then sign the cheques."

"And, when I have signed them, shall I be free?"

"I must cash them first."

"And after that?"

"After that, on my soul, as I hope to be saved, you will be free."

"I don't trust you."

"Have you any choice?"

"That's true. Hand me the cheques."

She unfastened Lupin's right hand, gave him a pen and said:

"Don't forget that the four cheques require four different signatures and that the handwriting has to be altered in each case."

"Never fear."

He signed the cheques.

"Gabriel," said the widow, "it is ten o'clock. If I am not back by twelve, it will mean that this scoundrel has played me one of his tricks. At twelve o'clock, blow out his brains. I am leaving you the revolver with which your uncle shot himself. There are five bullets left out of the six. That will be ample."

She left the room, humming a tune as she went.

Lupin mumbled:

"I wouldn't give twopence for my life."

He shut his eyes for an instant and then, suddenly, said to Gabriel:

"How much?"

And, when the other did not appear to understand, he grew irritated:

"I mean what I say. How much? Answer me, can't you? We drive the same trade, you and I. I steal, thou stealest, we steal. So we ought to come to terms: that's what we are here for. Well? Is it a bargain? Shall we clear out together. I will give you a post in my gang, an easy, well-paid post. How much do you want for yourself? Ten thousand? Twenty thousand? Fix your own price; don't be shy. There's plenty to be had for the asking."

An angry shiver passed through his frame as he saw the impassive face of his keeper:

"Oh, the beggar won't even answer! Why, you can't have been so fond of old Dugrival as all that! Listen to me: if you consent to release me...."

But he interrupted himself. The young man's eyes wore the cruel expression which he knew so well. What was the use of trying to move him?

"Hang it all!" he snarled. "I'm not going to croak here, like a dog! Oh, if I could only...."

Stiffening all his muscles, he tried to burst his bonds, making a violent effort that drew a cry of pain from him; and he fell back upon his bed, exhausted.

"Well, well," he muttered, after a moment, "it's as the widow said: my goose is cooked. Nothing to be done. *De profundis*, Lupin."

A quarter of an hour passed, half an hour....

Gabriel, moving closer to Lupin, saw that his eyes were shut and that his breath came evenly, like that of a man sleeping. But Lupin said:

"Don't imagine that I'm asleep, youngster. No, people don't sleep at a moment like this. Only I am consoling myself. Needs must, eh?... And then I am thinking of what is to come after.... Exactly. I have a little theory of my own about that. You wouldn't think it, to look at me, but I believe in metempsychosis, in the transmigration of souls. It would take too long to explain, however.... I say, boy ... suppose we shook hands before we part? You won't? Then good-bye. Good health and a long life to you, Gabriel!..."

He closed his eyelids and did not stir again before Mme. Dugrival's return.

The widow entered with a lively step, at a few minutes before twelve. She seemed greatly excited:

"I have the money," she said to her nephew. "Run away. I'll join you in the motor down below."

"But...."

"I don't want your help to finish him off. I can do that alone. Still, if you feel like seeing the sort of a face a rogue can pull.... Pass me the weapon."

Gabriel handed her the revolver and the widow continued:

"Have you burnt our papers?"

"Yes."

"Then to work. And, as soon as he's done for, be off. The shots may bring the neighbours. They must find both the flats empty."

She went up to the bed:

"Are you ready, Lupin?"

"Ready's not the word: I'm burning with impatience."

"Have you any request to make of me?"

"None."

"Then...."

"One word, though."

"What is it?"

"If I meet Dugrival in the next world, what message am I to give him from you?"

She shrugged her shoulders and put the barrel of the revolver to Lupin's temple.

"That's it," he said, "and be sure your hand doesn't shake, my dear lady. It won't hurt you, I swear. Are you ready? At the word of command, eh? One ... two ... three...."

The widow pulled the trigger. A shot rang out.

"Is this death?" said Lupin. "That's funny! I should have thought it was something much more different from life!"

There was a second shot. Gabriel snatched the weapon from his aunt's hands and examined it:

"Ah," he exclaimed, "the bullets have been removed!... There are only the percussion-caps left!..."

His aunt and he stood motionless, for a moment, and confused:

"Impossible!" she blurted out. "Who could have done it?... An inspector?... The examining-magistrate?..."

She stopped and, in a low voice:

"Hark.... I hear a noise...."

They listened and the widow went into the hall. She returned, furious, exasperated by her failure and by the scare which she had received:

"There's nobody there.... It must have been the neighbours going out.... We have plenty of time.... Ah, Lupin, you were beginning to make merry!... The knife, Gabriel."

"It's in my room."

"Go and fetch it."

Gabriel hurried away. The widow stamped with rage:

"I've sworn to do it!... You've got to suffer, my fine fellow!... I swore to Dugrival that I would do it and I have repeated my oath every morning and evening since.... I have taken it on my knees, yes, on my knees, before Heaven that listens to me! It's my duty and my right to revenge my dead husband!... By the way, Lupin, you don't look quite as merry as you did!... Lord, one would almost think you were afraid!... He's afraid! He's afraid! I can see it in his eyes!... Come along, Gabriel, my boy!... Look at his eyes!... Look at his lips!... He's trembling!... Give me the knife, so that I may dig it into his heart while he's shivering.... Oh, you coward!... Quick, quick, Gabriel, the knife!..."

"I can't find it anywhere," said the young man, running back in dismay. "It has gone from my room! I can't make it out!"

"Never mind!" cried the Widow Dugrival, half demented. "All the better! I will do the business myself."

She seized Lupin by the throat, clutched him with her ten fingers, digging her nails into his flesh, and began to squeeze with all her might. Lupin uttered a hoarse rattle and gave himself up for lost.

Suddenly, there was a crash at the window. One of the panes was smashed to pieces.

"What's that? What is it?" stammered the widow, drawing herself erect, in alarm.

Gabriel, who had turned even paler than usual, murmured:

"I don't know.... I can't think...."

"Who can have done it?" said the widow.

She dared not move, waiting for what would come next. And one thing above all terrified her, the fact that there was no missile on the floor around them, although the pane of glass, as was clearly visible, had

given way before the crash of a heavy and fairly large object, a stone, probably.

After a while, she looked under the bed, under the chest of drawers:

"Nothing," she said.

"No," said her nephew, who was also looking. And, resuming her seat, she said:

"I feel frightened ... my arms fail me ... you finish him off...."

Gabriel confessed:

"I'm frightened also."

"Still ... still," she stammered, "it's got to be done.... I swore it...."

Making one last effort, she returned to Lupin and gasped his neck with her stiff fingers. But Lupin, who was watching her pallid face, received a very clear sensation that she would not have the courage to kill him. To her he was becoming something sacred, invulnerable. A mysterious power was protecting him against every attack, a power which had already saved him three times by inexplicable means and which would find other means to protect him against the wiles of death.

She said to him, in a hoarse voice:

"How you must be laughing at me!"

"Not at all, upon my word. I should feel frightened myself, in your place."

"Nonsense, you scum of the earth! You imagine that you will be rescued ... that your friends are waiting outside? It's out of the question, my fine fellow."

"I know. It's not they defending me ... nobody's defending me...."

"Well, then?..."

"Well, all the same, there's something strange at the bottom of it, something fantastic and miraculous that makes your flesh creep, my fine lady."

"You villain!... You'll be laughing on the other side of your mouth before long."

"I doubt it."

"You wait and see."

She reflected once more and said to her nephew:

"What would you do?"

"Fasten his arm again and let's be off," he replied.

A hideous suggestion! It meant condemning Lupin to the most horrible of all deaths, death by starvation.

"No," said the widow. "He might still find a means of escape. I know something better than that."

She took down the receiver of the telephone, waited and asked:

"Number 82248, please."

And, after a second or two:

"Hullo!... Is that the Criminal Investigation Department?... Is Chief-inspector Ganimard there?... In twenty minutes, you say?... I'm sorry!... However!... When he comes, give him this message from Mme. Dugrival.... Yes, Mme. Nicolas Dugrival.... Ask him to come to my flat. Tell him to open the looking-glass door of my wardrobe; and, when he

has done so, he will see that the wardrobe hides an outlet which makes my bedroom communicate with two other rooms. In one of these, he will find a man bound hand and foot. It is the thief, Dugrival's murderer.... You don't believe me?... Tell M. Ganimard; he'll believe me right enough.... Oh, I was almost forgetting to give you the man's name: Arsène Lupin!"

And, without another word, she replaced the receiver.

"There, Lupin, that's done. After all, I would just as soon have my revenge this way. How I shall hold my sides when I read the reports of the Lupin trial!... Are you coming, Gabriel?"

"Yes, aunt."

"Good-bye, Lupin. You and I sha'n't see each other again, I expect, for we are going abroad. But I promise to send you some sweets while you're in prison."

"Chocolates, mother! We'll eat them together!"

"Good-bye."

"*Au revoir.*"

The widow went out with her nephew, leaving Lupin fastened down to the bed.

He at once moved his free arm and tried to release himself; but he realized, at the first attempt, that he would never have the strength to break the wire strands that bound him. Exhausted with fever and pain, what could he do in the twenty minutes or so that were left to him before Ganimard's arrival?

Nor did he count upon his friends. True, he had been thrice saved from death; but this was evidently due to an astounding series of accidents

and not to any interference on the part of his allies. Otherwise they would not have contented themselves with these extraordinary manifestations, but would have rescued him for good and all.

No, he must abandon all hope. Ganimard was coming. Ganimard would find him there. It was inevitable. There was no getting away from the fact.

And the prospect of what was coming irritated him singularly. He already heard his old enemy's gibes ringing in his ears. He foresaw the roars of laughter with which the incredible news would be greeted on the morrow. To be arrested in action, so to speak, on the battlefield, by an imposing detachment of adversaries, was one thing: but to be arrested, or rather picked up, scraped up, gathered up, in such condition, was really too silly. And Lupin, who had so often scoffed at others, felt all the ridicule that was falling to his share in this ending of the Dugrival business, all the bathos of allowing himself to be caught in the widow's infernal trap and finally of being "served up" to the police like a dish of game, roasted to a turn and nicely seasoned.

"Blow the widow!" he growled. "I had rather she had cut my throat and done with it."

He pricked up his ears. Some one was moving in the next room. Ganimard! No. Great as his eagerness would be, he could not be there yet. Besides, Ganimard would not have acted like that, would not have opened the door as gently as that other person was doing. What other person? Lupin remembered the three miraculous interventions to which he owed his life. Was it possible that there was really somebody who had protected him against the widow, and that that somebody was now attempting to rescue him? But, if so, who?

Unseen by Lupin, the stranger stooped behind the bed. Lupin heard the sound of the pliers attacking the wire strands and releasing him little by little. First his chest was freed, then his arms, then his legs.

And a voice said to him:

"You must get up and dress."

Feeling very weak, he half-raised himself in bed at the moment when the stranger rose from her stooping posture.

"Who are you?" he whispered. "Who are you?"

And a great surprise over came him.

By his side stood a woman, a woman dressed in black, with a lace shawl over her head, covering part of her face. And the woman, as far as he could judge, was young and of a graceful and slender stature.

"Who are you?" he repeated.

"You must come now," said the woman. "There's no time to lose."

"Can I?" asked Lupin, making a desperate effort. "I doubt if I have the strength."

"Drink this."

She poured some milk into a cup; and, as she handed it to him, her lace opened, leaving the face uncovered.

"You!" he stammered. "It's you!... It's you who ... it was you who were...."

He stared in amazement at this woman whose features presented so striking a resemblance to Gabriel's, whose delicate, regular face had the same pallor, whose mouth wore the same hard and forbidding expression. No sister could have borne so great a likeness to her brother. There was not a doubt possible: it was the identical person. And, without believing for a moment that Gabriel had concealed himself in a woman's clothes, Lupin, on the contrary, received the distinct impression that it

was a woman standing beside him and that the stripling who had pursued him with his hatred and struck him with the dagger was in very deed a woman. In order to follow their trade with greater ease, the Dugrival pair had accustomed her to disguise herself as a boy.

"You ... you ...!" he repeated. "Who would have suspected ...?"

She emptied the contents of a phial into the cup:

"Drink this cordial," she said.

He hesitated, thinking of poison.

She added:

"It was I who saved you."

"Of course, of course," he said. "It was you who removed the bullets from the revolver?"

"Yes."

"And you who hid the knife?"

"And you who smashed the window-pane while your aunt was throttling me?"

"Yes, it was I, with the paper-weight on the table: I threw it into the street."

"But why? Why?" he asked, in utter amazement.

"Drink the cordial."

"Didn't you want me to die? But then why did you stab me to begin with?"

"Drink the cordial."

He emptied the cup at a draught, without quite knowing the reason of his sudden confidence.

"Dress yourself ... quickly," she commanded, retiring to the window.

He obeyed and she came back to him, for he had dropped into a chair, exhausted.

"We must go now, we must, we have only just time.... Collect your strength."

She bent forward a little, so that he might lean on her shoulder, and turned toward the door and the staircase.

And Lupin walked as one walks in a dream, one of those queer dreams in which the most inconsequent things occur, a dream that was the happy sequel of the terrible nightmare in which he had lived for the past fortnight.

A thought struck him, however. He began to laugh:

"Poor Ganimard! Upon my word, the fellow has no luck, I would give twopence to see him coming to arrest me."

After descending the staircase with the aid of his companion, who supported him with incredible vigour, he found himself in the street, opposite a motor-car into which she helped him to mount.

"Right away," she said to the driver.

Lupin, dazed by the open air and the speed at which they were travelling, hardly took stock of the drive and of the incidents on the road. He recovered all his consciousness when he found himself at home in one of the flats which he occupied, looked after by his servant, to whom the girl gave a few rapid instructions.

"You can go," he said to the man.

But, when the girl turned to go as well, he held her back by a fold of her dress.

"No ... no ... you must first explain.... Why did you save me? Did you return unknown to your aunt? But why did you save me? Was it from pity?"

She did not answer. With her figure drawn up and her head flung back a little, she retained her hard and impenetrable air. Nevertheless, he thought he noticed that the lines of her mouth showed not so much cruelty as bitterness. Her eyes, her beautiful dark eyes, revealed melancholy. And Lupin, without as yet understanding, received a vague intuition of what was passing within her. He seized her hand. She pushed him away, with a start of revolt in which he felt hatred, almost repulsion. And, when he insisted, she cried:

"Let me be, will you?... Let me be!... Can't you see that I detest you?"

They looked at each other for a moment, Lupin disconcerted, she quivering and full of uneasiness, her pale face all flushed with unwonted colour.

He said to her, gently:

"If you detested me, you should have let me die.... It was simple enough.... Why didn't you?"

"Why?... Why?... How do I know?..."

Her face contracted. With a sudden movement, she hid it in her two hands; and he saw tears trickle between her fingers.

Greatly touched, he thought of addressing her in fond words, such as one would use to a little girl whom one wished to console, and of giving her good advice and saving her, in his turn, and snatching her from the bad life which she was leading, perhaps against her better nature.

But such words would have sounded ridiculous, coming from his lips, and he did not know what to say, now that he understood the whole story and was able to picture the young woman sitting beside his sick-bed, nursing the man whom she had wounded, admiring his pluck and gaiety, becoming attached to him, falling in love with him and thrice over, probably in spite of herself, under a sort of instinctive impulse, amid fits of spite and rage, saving him from death.

And all this was so strange, so unforeseen; Lupin was so much unmanned by his astonishment, that, this time, he did not try to retain her when she made for the door, backward, without taking her eyes from him.

She lowered her head, smiled for an instant and disappeared.

He rang the bell, quickly:

"Follow that woman," he said to his man. "Or no, stay where you are.... After all, it is better so...."

He sat brooding for a while, possessed by the girl's image. Then he revolved in his mind all that curious, stirring and tragic adventure, in which he had been so very near succumbing; and, taking a hand-glass from the table, he gazed for a long time and with a certain self-complacency at his features, which illness and pain had not succeeded in impairing to any great extent:

"Good looks count for something, after all!" he muttered.

FIN

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Arsène Lupin

Fictional gentleman thief and master of disguise created by French writer Maurice Leblanc

Arsène Lupin is a fictional gentleman thief and master of disguise created in 1905 by French writer Maurice Leblanc. The character was first introduced in a series of short stories serialized in the magazine Je sais tout. The first story, "The Arrest of Arsène Lupin", was published on 15 July 1905. Lupin is often described as the criminal counterpart to Sherlock Holmes, often encountering "Herlock Sholmès" in his own adventures. The character has also appeared in a number of books by other writers as well as numerous films, stage plays,